Threats from Below

In this paper I discuss the pragmatics of directives as they are embedded in institutions and social structures. I focus in particular on commands and threats, and describe the role such speech acts play in *escalation* -- in shifting discourse from deliberation to bargaining, negotiation or parley. I describe "threats from below" within the context of *contention* and highlight the promise and peril such moves have for collective action in the lead up to strikes, blockades, and boycotts. I provide reasons for thinking that at least some such threats are not only permissible but *legitimate* motivators for action against background conditions of inequality, domination, and coercion.